

MEPI MEDREGION UPDATE

MEDREGION UPDATE

THE INAUGURATION OF PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA



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**MEPI IN 2009—
APPLY FOR A
GRANT!**

- The Tunis Regional Office has almost \$2 million to support grants in the region.
- Details on how to apply can be found on page two or with your local MEPI committee.
- Make this the year to become involved with your community...and MEPI activities!

On January 20th Barack H. Obama, the United States' 44th President, was inaugurated in Washington D.C. in a ceremony watched by millions around the world. During his inauguration speech, President Obama made many important statements, a selection of which we've included below:

"To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect."

"To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent,



know that you are on the wrong side of history; but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist."

"For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth."



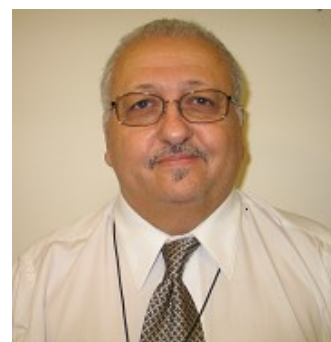
For the full transcript of the inauguration speech, please click on the language of your choice: [Arabic](#), [English](#), or [French](#) from [America.Gov](#), a website full of useful facts and information about the recent inauguration and the democratic process in the United States. We've also linked the speech at our [MEPI RO website](#).

WELCOME TO OUR NEW GRANTS MANAGEMENT ANALYST!

Valdemar Jensen is the new Grants Management Analyst at the Tunis Regional Office. Born in Dakar, Senegal, he was raised in The Gambia, West Africa. He was a career public sector banker and worked at the Central Bank of The Gambia for several years in the Economic Research and Banking Services Departments. At the time of his retirement he was the General Manager of the Bank.

Valdemar has a Bachelor's degree in Economics, Law and History from the University of London and a Master's degree in Monetary and Development Economics from the Catholic University of America in Washington DC. He became a US citizen in September 2006. Valdemar and his wife Barbara have two grown children.

Valdemar joins Nadim and Wassila in the Grants unit.



A warm MEPI welcome to Valdemar Jensen!

SNJ IN ALGERIA ADDRESSES PRESS LAWS

The National Syndicate of Journalists (SNJ) in Algeria reported on its 2008 MEPI-funded grant, entitled: “The practice of journalism: Between the violation of press law and the challenge of self-regulation” intended to contribute to the promotion of greater government transparency and press responsibility by exposing communication officials, journalists covering the Algerian government, and university journalism professors to the important role that press laws in Algeria play and the need to reform them, as well as the broader rights and responsibilities of journalists .

The seminar, which also commemorated World Press Freedom Day, shed light upon the issue of defamation laws in Algeria used to pressure and intimidate journalists, and was attended by imminent lawyers and experts in information law, human rights activists, journalists, and the Algerian Coordinator for the International Federation of Journalists .

In a speech delivered at the seminar, then US Ambassador Robert Ford praised the progress made towards greater freedom of

press in Algeria over the past decade, but highlighted the need for Algerian journalists to raise their professional standards and do away with self censorship. The Ambassador also called for the decriminalization of defamation and pointed out that several countries, such as Mexico and Albania, have amended their laws to make defamation a civil, as opposed to a criminal offense.

Several lawyers and experts in information law shared their thoughts on how the Algerian press laws could be amended to better protect journalists from governmental pressure. The discussion was open and candid, as participants criticized the newspapers for not doing enough to protect their correspondents throughout the country and called for more professionalism among journalists.

At the end of the seminar, the participants called upon each other and the Algerian journalist community as a whole, to begin formulating an amendment to the press laws that they could present to the government in order to affect positive change and progress towards a more free and independent press.

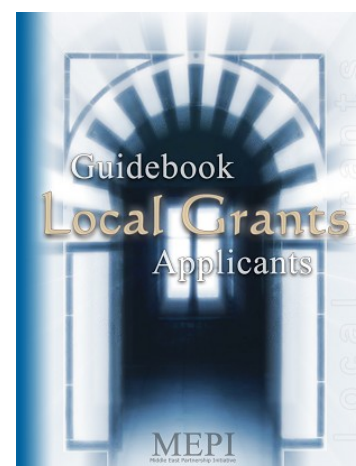


“The seminar shed light upon the issue of defamation laws in Algeria used to pressure and intimidate journalists”

SUBMIT YOUR GRANT APPLICATIONS NOW!

Funding is available now for Local Grants. Please contact your country’s US Embassy MEPI Committee and see the guidebook available on our [website](#) for step-by-step instructions in English, Arabic, or French!

Become a partner for reform.



THE IMPORTANCE OF A FREE AND INDEPENDENT MEDIA

As modern societies grow in size and complexity, the arena for communication and public debate has become dominated by the media: radio and television, newspapers, magazines, books — and increasingly by newer media such as the Internet and satellite television.

Whether Web logs (known as blogs) or printed books, the media in a democracy have a number of overlapping but distinctive functions that remain fundamentally unchanged. One is to inform and educate. To make intelligent decisions about public policy, people need accurate, timely, unbiased information. However, another media function may be to advocate, even without pretense of objectivity. Media audiences may benefit from various, conflicting opinions, in order to obtain a wide range of viewpoints. This role is especially important during election campaigns, when few voters will have the opportunity to see, much less talk with, candidates in person.

A second function of the media is to serve as a watchdog over government and other powerful institutions in the society. By holding to a standard of independence and objectivity, however imperfectly, the news media can expose the truth behind the



Goodshot/Alamy

claims of governments and hold public officials accountable for their actions.

The media can also take a more active role in public debate through editorials or investigative reporting, and serve as a forum for groups and individuals to express their opinions through letters and articles, and postings on the Web, with divergent points of view.

Commentators point to another increasingly important role for the media: "setting the agenda." Since they can't report everything, the news media must choose which issues to highlight and which to ignore. In short, they tend to decide what news is and what isn't. These decisions, in turn, influence the public's perception of what issues are most important. Unlike countries where the news is controlled by the government, however, the media in a democracy cannot simply ma-

nipulate or disregard issues at will. Their competitors, after all, are free to call attention to their own lists of important issues.

Citizens of a democracy live with the conviction that through the open exchange of ideas and opinions, truth will eventually win out over falsehood, the values of others will be better understood, areas of compromise more clearly defined, and the path of progress opened. The greater the volume of such exchanges, the better. Writer E.B. White once put it this way: "The press in our free country is reliable and useful not because of its good character but because of its great diversity. As long as there are many owners, each pursuing their own brand of truth, we the people have the opportunity to arrive at the truth and dwell in the light. ...There is safety in numbers."

- From '[Democracy in brief](#)'

"Unlike countries where the news is controlled by the government, however, the media in a democracy cannot simply manipulate or disregard issues at will."

